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# SERVICE

## USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

U.S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE · OFFICE OF INFORMATION · WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

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### RESEARCH REPORT

Science Fiction in the Kitchen. Outer space isn't way out any more. It's in. New concepts in food processing are quickly taking their place among the more conventional freezing, canning and drying methods. Take the irradiation of foods. U.S. Department of Agriculture research scientists say that in another 2 to 5 years you'll probably be finding irradiated foods in your supermarket. Bacon, wheat and wheat flour, and white potatoes have already been given the go-ahead by the Food and Drug Administration. Approval of other items--such as canned ham, oranges and some fish--is pending. Irradiation pasteurization can double or triple the life of certain fruits. The added cost is no more than some freezing methods.

Guacamole. Though it has the hide of an alligator and a heart of stone, an avocado actually is a very tender fruit. And for this reason, few make it to the retail store. For years, producers have been plagued with the problem of what to do with avocados that are too small and too ripe for the consumer market. Now they think they have the answer. Guacamole--an avocado recipe from Mexico, the home of the avocado. A slight variation in the guacamole salad recipe converts it into a paste. Food economists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture say guacamole paste is now being tried in several New Orleans restaurants. Frozen paste is served as a salad, as a dip, a hot vegetable and even as a soup.

Knock on Wood. Before too long home gardeners may be planting seeds and cuttings in wood pulp blocks instead of peat pots. The blocks are divided like an ice cube tray with a plant growing in each cube. Each block has all the nutrients the plant needs right in it--plus a material that protects the seeds, and later the plants, from decay. When the plants are ready to be set out, the cubes are broken off the block and planted. The roots are never disturbed. As the plant develops, the roots grow through the cube and into the surrounding soil. The cube then dissolves and helps fertilize the plant. The wood pulp blocks have already been developed--at the Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station. They are now being market tested.

Shake Down. Soundwaves, adapted from military radar and sonar, are being used on food packaging lines to settle such things as cornflakes and crackers, according to food technologists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This should allow manufacturers to fill packages--and help do away with consumer complaints about "half-empty" boxes.





Honeycomb Sandwich. A collapsible honeycomb of kraft paper is being used--expanded and faced with aluminum--in the construction of airplane bulkheads. The opened honeycomb offers strength but not weight, a valuable consideration in the airplane industry. The idea for making these lightweight walls of paper came from the Forest Products Laboratory of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Madison, Wis. Paper honeycombs are now generally available commercially.

For a Lovelier Head. Ever bought lettuce with little brown spots on it--spots that grow progressively worse the longer you keep the lettuce? These are russet spots, and they cause considerable loss to the lettuce industry. Retailers try to keep affected lettuce off their produce counters. They aren't always successful. Now, however, U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists have discovered how to reduce spotting during transit. They add liquid nitrogen to the atmosphere inside the shipping trailer. Preliminary tests show that it works. This could mean considerably less spoilage and possibly lower retail prices for consumers. One thing is certain. It can mean better lettuce at your supermarket.

A Coat You Can Eat. An infinitely thin coating of edible fat--sprayed on food products--locks out oxygen and seals in quality, U.S. Department of Agriculture researchers find. It also cuts down on packaging costs. Take nuts as an example. With the coating, the nuts stay just as fresh in cellophane bags that cost 20 cents a case as in cans at 95 cents. The same process could be used on meats, poultry and fish, the scientists say. The outer fat coating would become part of the frying fat or gravy. Or, it could be removed by holding the coated food under hot running water for a few minutes. USDA economists estimate the potential market for edible coatings may soon reach 75 million pounds annually.

New Glue. Inexpensive southern pine--otherwise ideal for plywood manufacture--requires expensive glues to hold it together. At least, it has to date. Now a new glue has been formulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture at its Peoria, Ill., Laboratories. Preliminary tests show this glue--made of soybean flour and industrial starch--is not only cheaper than the adhesives now used but faster. Its performance under commercial conditions, however, remains to be tested.

#### GARDENING--INSIDE AND OUT

White Flower Pots. If you have clay flower pots that have turned white, toss them out. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the whiteness is unused fertilizer, and you can't get it off the pot. Putting a fresh plant into a white clay pot is like putting the plant into salty water.

Stick 'Em Up. Cankerworms (alias loopers, inchworms and measuring worms) are fond of apple and elm trees. But they really aren't fussy. They'll attack oak, cherry, hickory, maple, ash, beech and linden trees, too. DDT and lead arsenate may be used to control cankerworms. But if you have only a few trees, try this suggestion from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Attach a sticky band around the trees. Female cankerworms are wingless. They must crawl up the tree to get their dinner and lay their eggs. Now is the time to install the bands. Spring cankerworms come out of the ground in March and April.

Tree-Planting Tips. If the ground is thawed, you can plant deciduous trees--elms, oaks, maples, etc.--in March. Sizeable trees can be planted bare-rooted, if they have not yet leafed out. The U.S. Department of Agriculture urges you to be sure to: (1) make the hole big enough to allow root spread; (2) fill hole with good or improved soil; (3) leave saucer-like basin around base, extending several feet from trunk; (4) mulch; (5) stake and guy being sure wires around tree are covered with rubber hose; (6) water thoroughly.

How Much Is Enough? To be sure you give your house plants just the right amount of water, try this trick used by U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists in their green-houses. Get a funnel with a diameter about half that of your flower pot. Stick it in the soil and fill it with water. Continue to add water until the soil will take no more. (Remove the funnel by sticking your finger into the soil and capping the end so the water doesn't spill out.) This method gives your plants a thorough watering.

#### FOOD FACTS

The Bargain That's Ketchup. Almost anywhere in the United States--from Walla Walla, Wash., to Bar Harbor, Me.--you can buy ketchup for around a penny an ounce. This pays for raising the tomatoes, onions, garlic and sugar cane; importing the pepper; buying bottles and shipping containers; paying the railroads, the truckers and everyone else who handles the ketchup as it makes its way to the supermarket shelf.

Cooking Hint. It's easy to overcook chicken, say home economists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Because breasts cook quicker than some of the thicker parts, such as the legs, they often end up dry and chewy. Next time you cook chicken parts, give the legs a 10-minute headstart on the stove. Then add the breasts. You'll find they're more flavorful, tender and juicy.

What's Plentiful. There's lots of good eating ahead this month and next--if you shop the Plentiful List of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These are the foods expected to be in good supply--and more than likely at good prices for consumers: March--eggs, peanuts and everything made with peanuts, pork, oranges, grapefruit, green split peas, canned salmon and rice. April--eggs, beef, fish, oranges and orange juice, grapefruit, peanuts and peanut products.

Holding the Lunch Line. "What's happening to the price of a school lunch?" many parents are asking. The answer is simple. Food and labor costs have gone up; Federal and State contributions have stayed the same. Something has had to give. And it's been the price of the lunch. Usually the increase has been no more than a nickel--possibly a dime. The average lunch still costs only 30 to 35 cents. This money accounts for about 60 percent of the cost of a lunch. State and local funds contribute another 22 percent, and cash and food donations from the U.S. Department of Agriculture provide the remainder.

#### OUTDOORS.

On the Trail. To hike or bike, ride or walk--there's a pressing need for a nationwide system of trails, says Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman. Together with Interior Secretary Stewart L. Udall, Secretary Freeman urges the establishment of metropolitan trails, park and forest trails, and long National Scenic Trails. The Cabinet officers explain: "Walking, hiking, and bicycling are simple pleasures within the economic reach of virtually all citizens. . . . (Yet) opportunities to enjoy these basic activities have become increasingly limited." A national system of trails would meet this need by upgrading existing trails and creating new trails not only in woodland parks and forests but in and near population centers.

#### CLOTHING

Make Do. As winter nears its end--and most of your daughter's dresses have become outgrown--convert them into between-season garments. USDA clothing specialists tell how to do it. If the dress has too tight sleeves, make it into a sleeveless model. If the neck's too small, cut off the collar and enlarge. Face on the outside with contrasting fabric. Use this same fabric to lengthen the skirt. Presto, your child will have a practically new dress to greet the new season--and one that fits.



## PLANS AND PUBLICATIONS

For Rain or Shine. A picnic shelter with a high-flying roof has been designed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It's ideal for a roadside campground or picnic area, for farmers who are turning their land into recreation spots--or for the homeowner who wants to add a bit of shade to a sunny backyard. The roof is supported by three posts. It is triangular in shape with a high crown and long projecting overhangs at each point of the triangle. Not only does the shelter have a pleasing architectural appearance, it's economical to build. For more information about this delightful shelter, write to the Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Ask for MP-1047. It's free. For complete working drawings (Plan No. 5995), contact the Extension agricultural engineer at your State university. There may be a slight blueprinting charge.

Growing Boxwoods. If you live in the Middle Atlantic States, you may be interested in planting a few boxwoods. Boxwoods are easy to grow, easy to care for. They do well in most soils, in sunshine or shade. Their prime requirements are weather that's mild and a soil that's well drained. For more complete instructions on how to select, plant and care for boxwoods, write for the new USDA publication, "Growing Boxwoods," HG-120. You may get a copy free from the Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Request on a postcard.

A Plan for Outdoor Beauty. A school in Minnesota, a county in Ohio, a town in upstate New York. All are using Greenspan grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to create parks, recreation facilities, wildlife preserves. Land not needed for crop production is being shifted to public use as part of this new program to afford corridors of green for those living in town and city. Any State, county, city or town government is eligible. Sign-up will continue through 1969. For more information on how your community can take advantage of this plan for outdoor beauty, write for PA-762, "The Greenspan Way to More Space." Make your request on a postcard to: Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 20250.

Managing Family Finances. Do you know how to be a good shopper, manage your money, understand life insurance and credit buying? Four practical publications of the U.S. Department of Agriculture can make you knowledgeable in all these things. They take the guesswork out of family finances. They explain the facts behind credit buying, the differences between term insurance, straight life and endowment policies. They provide tips on shopping, saving, budgeting. To obtain these valuable publications, request from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Ask for Extension consumer publications: "Be a Good Shopper" (5¢). "Managing Your Money" (10¢). "Understanding Life Insurance for the Family" (10¢). "When You Use Credit" (10¢).

## STARTLING STATISTIC

Down the Hatch. How much food do you think the average family of four eats in a year? Over 2 1/2 tons, reports USDA. Of this, nearly three-fourths of a ton are dairy products. About half a ton is meat, poultry and fish; another half a ton, fruits and vegetables. The rest is made up of miscellaneous food items.

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